

*Raise them
Well*

*Social
Maturity*



Teaching the Way of Love

because humanity passes by way of the family . . .

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PLEASE PRAY
THAT

- Parents will honor the dignity of others, especially within the home.
- Moms and Dads will make time to just be with their children and enjoy them.
- Parents will ask the Holy Spirit to help their family be respectful in word and deed.
- Families will joyfully work to put God at the center of all they do.
- Families will cultivate deep friendships within their extended family.
- Parents will learn how to correct their children in charity rather than anger.
- No child (or parent) will ever find themselves beyond God's love and mercy.
- Family time will be cherished.

Help Your Child See and Respect Dignity in All People

A mother of a 4-year-old is anxious that her child will take toys away from other kids at preschool. A father of an 8-year-old son learns that bullying is happening at school. A dad of a 16-year-old daughter rarely hears her talk about close friends.

What do all of these parents have in common? They are worried that their child may be socially immature for their age and won't get along with others.

The dictionary tells us that a person is socially mature when they have the ability to both be aware of the common good and to act in a way or ways that contribute to the common good. Our Catholic Faith clarifies this a bit more by teaching us that social maturity is the ability to both recognize the inherent dignity of the other and act in a way that wills the good of the other.

Parents who are concerned about social maturity should take comfort in knowing that social maturity unfolds over time. One reason for this is that, by God's design, the human brain changes dramatically from childhood through adulthood. Little children begin their social life by being 'me' centered. They lack the ability to see another's perspective or to read social skills. As each birth-



day passes, they gain the capacity to see beyond their own needs and to recognize the desires of those around them; if you will they become 'we' centered.

While parents can't rush or hurry the transition from the 'me' to the 'we' phase of social development, there are definite steps that can be taken to smooth the path from one to the other. The Book of Proverbs (22:6) explains to us that parents are to "train the young in the way they should go (so) they will not swerve from it. This small but powerful verse reminds us that parents need to guide children in a process of learning how to live in harmony with others.

Let's take a look at a progression of techniques that parents can use as they accompany their child on the path towards social maturity.

Because humanity passes by way of the family...

Little children learn by example and are quick to imitate their parents' behaviors. Thus, parents of toddlers and pre-schoolers who want their children to get along will **demonstrate respect, manners and civility in their daily action and speech**. The more consistently parents demonstrate social concern for the common good of others, the greater the transfer of socially acceptable behaviors to the child.

When parents observe their children gaining a greater perspective of other people, they need to instruct and **practice the basic social skill of self-assertion**. This is the ability to speak up when a boundary has been crossed. It is the middle ground that exists between avoiding a conflict and becoming aggressive.

As time advances and the teenage years approach, youth become even more aware that other people think and feel differently than they do and form impressions about them. This is both a blessing and a challenge for parents. The expanding awareness of the world should lead to selflessness and a desire to be interdependent. But, if it is not guided by parents, it often leads to the temptation to manipulate the bigger world for one's own selfishness. This is when parents need to **dialogue with their child and spend time in discussion and formation**. Dialogue is a two-way exchange in which both the youth and his parents are seeking to understand what is going on. Within the family, the youth should know that he is secure enough to ask any question or raise any concern and that his parents have the right and duty to charitably correct behaviors that go against the common good and God's plan for dignity.

Raise Them to be Socially Mature

Did you notice the tag line on the flip side of this newsletter which says, "humanity passes by way of the family"? This quote was written by Saint Pope John Paul II who considered the family the obvious place for children to learn how to live in harmony with others. The family is the perfect place for social maturity to begin, develop and mature because it provides a daily opportunity for parents to model what God intends for social maturity. Let's take a closer look at how specific social skills you can develop during October.

- Intentionally look at the face and eyes of every person you talk with this month. No exceptions. Give them your full attention.
- Stop interrupting individuals who are talking with you.
- When a boundary has been crossed by someone in your family, calmly and directly explain how you feel and what you want to happen.
- Schedule a 'date' with every child that you have. During the date, ask questions that will get more than a 'yes' or 'no' answer. Enjoy their company as you seek to understand what they are thinking.
- Google 'Table Manners' to learn common dining practices. Implement these at home.
- Play board games that have a winner and a loser. Demonstrate how to be a gracious winner or loser.
- Challenge yourself to pray for a person whose rude or thoughtless behaviors negatively impacted you.

This challenge is just a small part of good Catholic parenting. Visit www.twl4parents.com for more strategies that will help you become the best parent you can be. And for the best systematic approach to parenting, consider purchasing the Teaching the Way of Love program, which can be found at the same website.

This article series is brought to you by Alice Heinzen and Jeff Arrowood, authors of the Teaching the Way of Love home study series for parents. Find out more at www.twl4parents.com/teaching-the-way-of-love.